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Carsey: Coos Youth Show Strong Attachment To Community

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DURHAM, N.H. - Youth in rural Coos County have surprisingly strong ties to their communities, finds a new report from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire. The brief is the first to report on a 10-year panel study of students who began seventh and 11th grades in 2007 in Coos, New Hampshire's northernmost and most rural county.

"What is most striking about these data are the contradictions in the lives of these young people," says report author Nena Stracuzzi, a research assistant professor at the Carsey Institute. "They're strongly attached to Coos, yet they're often leaving because of a lack of opportunities. They also have high educational aspirations, despite the fact that few adults in their communities have bachelor's degrees."

The study includes 656 students from all nine public schools in the county's five school districts. Students were surveyed on their attitudes about education, employment, family and community. Among the key findings:

- Students reported a strong attachment to their communities, with 62 percent responding they were "proud to represent [their] community" and "happy to participate in community events" and 79 percent responding "people get along with one another."
- The overwhelming majority (90 percent) of students intends to graduate from college, and 42 percent intend to pursue a graduate or professional degree, despite the fact that fewer than 17 percent of all Coos County adults over age 25 have bachelor's degrees.
- Sixteen percent of the students report sometimes going hungry, a rate more than twice the state's average and about 40 percent higher than in the United States as a whole.
- On measures of emotional well-being, most students are doing well. "Close family, school and community relationships may very well be a key reason why the majority of youth are doing quite well," says Stracuzzi.
- Despite their attachment to their communities and families, more than one-half of students report they are unlikely to remain in their communities for most of their lives, and 37 percent report they are likely to leave and never return.

"This report will help state and community stakeholders gain a better appreciation of the obstacles Coos County young people confront in making successful transitions to adulthood," says Stracuzzi, who worked with co-investigators and Carsey faculty fellows Cesar Rebellon, associate professor of sociology, Karen Van Gundy, associate professor of sociology, and Corinna Jenkins Tucker, associate professor of family studies. "The responses in this survey will ultimately help communities determine how they might retain and attract the young working adults who help these communities maintain their vitality."

The brief, "Youth Aspirations and Sense of Place in a Changing Rural Economy: The Coos Youth Study," is available to download here: <http://carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/IB-CoosYouth-1.pdf>. It was supported by the Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation as well as the Carsey Institute endowment.

The Carsey Institute conducts policy and applied research on vulnerable families and on sustainable community development, giving policy makers and practitioners the timely, independent resources they need to effect change in their communities.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 11,800 undergraduate and 2,400 graduate students.

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